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## MR. BALFOUR AND HIS OPPORTUNITIES.

BY SIR GILBERT PARKER, M.P.

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Many qualities are needed by one who would hold a commanding place in that critical yet tolerant, imperious yet considerate assembly, the British House of Commons—many qualities of mind, of body, of temper, of social and intellectual equipment. The leader of the English parties should have a dignified or at least a sufficing presence. Little men, of modest physical aspect, have often led armies, from the days of Alexander to those of Lord Roberts of Candahar; but he who would sway the House of Commons, with its contingent of athletes and sportsmen, had best be tall and straight. He should be a “gentleman,” of course, a member of that territorial aristocracy which has virtually ruled Britain, with much assistance from the moneyed merchant classes, since the Revolution of 1689. And he should preferably have a tincture of scholarship and cultivated knowledge. The House, it is often said, is not a highly intellectual body. It contains fewer men of letters and learning than most of the legislatures of Continental Europe. The professors, historians, political economists, jurists, *savants*, publicists, who are so much in evidence in France and Germany, are rare figures at Westminster, and are mostly regarded with a shyness not unmixed with doubt. Perhaps for this reason members of Parliament appreciate a certain

measure of culture in their chiefs. Above this, however, they set certain qualifications which may be called moral. The House is not a priggish society; on the contrary, it is a little cynical, a little indolent, confidently careless, somewhat superficial, much disposed to treat ethical problems with the disdainful tolerance of the man of the world. But it likes its leaders to be in earnest. It demands that they shall "sit tight" and "play the game," and do their work, not as amateurs surprised into responsibility, but with honest conviction, resolute fairness, and an unflinching sense of its value and importance. No man succeeds in the House of Commons who does not take the assembly seriously. Yet zeal must be founded on knowledge. The party-leader should begin young and serve a long apprenticeship. There have been few—a very few—who have stormed their way to Parliamentary influence in their first or second session. But, as a rule, a member must sit long on the green benches before he will be listened to with attention, longer still before his voice can carry weight, and so carrying reach a larger, if not surer, audience in the country. Experience here counts for more than talent, and far more than any outside reputation, however imposing. The Parliamentary guide followed most willingly is he who has found his career in the House of Commons itself and pursued it steadily there.

Now, in these respects, Mr. Balfour is a typical leader. He is just such a man, as one might, *a priori*, infer that the Chief of the House of Commons would be. He has those gifts of mind and character, and temperament, which the House values and admires. An untitled country gentleman, to all intents and purposes, he belongs to the territorial aristocracy from which English Cabinets are for the most part recruited. He has athletic tastes, and is fond of outdoor amusements. He has a creditable amount of culture, knows something about music and pictures, and has written books which reveal not only an acute critical faculty, but sound knowledge of philosophy, of literature and of theology. He is a student, interested in high and austere themes, as a British Premier should be. And with all this, he is essentially a House of Commons man. Mr. Balfour is so many years younger than some of the veterans who have dominated English politics of late years, such as Mr. Gladstone, Lord Salisbury, Sir William Harcourt, Sir Michael Hicks-Beach, and he has so much

of the alertness, the freshness and the many-sided interests of youth, that one forgets how long a period his political career has covered. He is in reality quite an old "Parliamentary hand." It is not far off thirty years since, a young man of six-and-twenty, he first entered the House of Commons as member for Hertford, and he has represented the Eastern Division of Manchester since 1885. His political début was made among figures who, for the most part, have long quitted the stage: Mr. Gladstone, the late Lord Iddesleigh, Mr. W. H. Smith, and Lord Randolph Churchill. It is not forgotten—or perhaps it is forgotten—that Mr. Balfour was for a short period a member of Lord Randolph's "Fourth Party," when the brilliant and forceful leader of that active little group was revitalizing the lethargic Toryism of the early eighties. There are few of his colleagues in the House of Commons who have been associated with English party politics, in their most intimate phases, more closely than the present Premier. And this is a source of confidence. The House of Commons likes to feel that it is in the hands of a man who really understands the inner working of that curiously modified and regulated civil conflict whereby the English constitution achieves its ends.

Mr. Balfour, like most public men, has sometimes spoken slightly of the party system. It is one of those sacrifices on the altar of conviction which English audiences expect from time to time. But he has more than once clearly disclosed his conviction that Parliamentary government depends for its efficient operation on a well-marked dualism of opinion, embodied in distinct and well-defined parties. For Mr. Balfour, indeed, it is clear that the party game has always had a singular fascination. It might be going too far to say that it is this side of politics which mainly attracts him; but there is no doubt that it does interest him more intensely, perhaps, than either executive or legislative business. In this, he is the antithesis of his friend and colleague, Mr. Chamberlain. The Colonial Secretary seems to me one of those persons who are born for politics as some men are born for poetry, others for music or natural science. He is, in the Aristotelian sense, a politician by nature; and I suppose he would have concerned himself in the work of law-making and administration whatever his opportunities or course of life had been. If he had never arrived at the Imperial Parliament, had

there never been spread before him a vista of satisfied ambition, I cannot think that his faculty for public affairs would have been allowed to rust. Wanting the chance of becoming a member of Parliament or a Cabinet Minister, he would have remained a Town Councillor; and should he never indeed have reached the Corporation of Birmingham, he must still have occupied himself, I imagine, with the affairs of the Vestry or the Parish Council, with the ardour of the born public man. Mr. Chamberlain loves politics with the craftsman's delight in his work, irrespective of its effects and rewards; it is art for art's sake. With Mr. Balfour, one conceives, it is different. His mind, at once comprehensive and subtle, has many interests, many preoccupations. Politics to him is only one of many pursuits which make inroads upon his time and gratify his inclinations. Indeed, for several years after he first entered Parliament, it seemed that he would never be willing to make those sacrifices to public life which are necessary to full success. He was too refined, too fastidious, too fond of diffusing himself over many shining fields. And one may well ask why a man so fortunately placed, so happily endowed, should have given himself up to the servitude of leadership and office. His books, his taste for art, his "philosophic" writing and study, his golf, his cycling, the care of his estates, the society of his friends,—all these must have been and still are, eager rivals with politics for his supreme regard. One may conjecture that it is the excitement of the party struggle which has finally turned the scale.

At the root of Mr. Balfour's character, overlaid and half-concealed by his graceful suavity of manner, there lies a hard stratum of Caledonian combativeness. He loves the "strenuous life" perhaps almost as much as President Roosevelt, though he does not talk about it. In many ways, Mr. Balfour may seem the *fine fleur* of English aristocratic culture, but he has the Lowland Scot's affection for a fight, his delight in the righteous discomfiture of an opponent. Yet there is a rare nobility and magnanimity in him which never permits him to triumph over, to trumpet boastfully, the defeat of his foe. In all his Parliamentary experience, he has never made his conquest galling or placed a heel upon a vanquished neck; and his temptations have at times been natural and great. To him, nevertheless, the party conflict gives a zest to politics, which possibly the mere de-

tails of administrative business could not offer. Mr. Chamberlain, in order to compass great national ends, has conscientiously quitted his colleagues before, and one could imagine that, in like circumstances, he might do so again. But Mr. Balfour would no more abandon his party than he would throw down his club in the middle of a round of golf and refuse to finish the game. He would sink or swim with his party and his leader, whether with greater patriotism is another question. That is one of the sources of his influence in the House of Commons. The British Parliament is no longer made up chiefly of sportsmen. Many members, especially on the Liberal side, would be uneasy on a horse and awkward with a gun. But the sporting tradition prevails in the House, even to a larger extent than in ordinary English society. There is no legislature where deeper interest is taken in the playing of the game; none where principles and ideas count for less and personalities more. The average Conservative or Liberal, with his practical contempt for general propositions, seldom pauses to consider the ultimate results of the proceedings of his leaders; he is far too much absorbed in their immediate consequences, in their effects on his own side and that of his opponents. It is a splendid, continuous, exalted kind of cricket-match, and the spectators and performers are always waiting to applaud the skilful champion who takes the wickets or makes the runs. If he is the Captain of one or other of the teams, they seek from him knowledge and judgment to arrange his field properly, and the pluck to play steadily to the end, whether winning or losing.

All great English party-leaders have enjoyed, though they may have deprecated, this stimulating struggle. Pitt, Canning, Palmerston, Disraeli, Gladstone, Randolph Churchill—these were men to whom the atmosphere of rivalry in the House of Commons was the breath of life. When, therefore, one says that Mr. Balfour is a keen party man, it is only implied that he is following in the steps of the most eminent of his predecessors. He realises, as they did, that with all its obvious defects and weaknesses, the party system is of the essence of the British Constitution. It is as much a part of this unwritten code of tacit understandings and necessary fictions as the Cabinet itself (a thing which has no formal existence) or even the House of Commons; since neither Cabinet nor Commons could discharge their functions

without it. Still there may be a change before us, and Mr. Balfour has seemed occasionally to hint that he believes a change to be coming. The good mechanician, however, is he who knows and masters such instruments as he possesses. The steam locomotive may be destined to be superseded by the electric motor; but the engineer, even while he recognizes the fact, does not omit to perfect and keep in order his boilers and furnaces. Mr. Balfour knows that, for the present, the business of the British realm must be done through and by the agency of party government, and that he is likely to do most who understands the two great parties best.

Ever since Mr. Gladstone's plunge into Home Rule, the Liberals have been divided, impotent, distracted. It seems that they are likely to remain in this condition for some time longer. The work of Britain for peace or war has been done for thirteen out of the past sixteen years, by the Unionists, and it may continue to be done by them. The man who leads the Conservatives in the House of Commons, even if he were not the titular Prime Minister, must have the most effective voice in the conduct of affairs. Since 1891 this has been Mr. Balfour's duty; and, looking back upon it, one may say that, on the whole, it has been well accomplished. If I can trust my own observations and the testimony of many competent and experienced judges, there was not one of his recent predecessors who, through a series of years, proved more acceptable to the Conservative party in Parliament and the country. The House of Commons likes a man who is "safe" in the best sense; safe, not because he is merely a pedestrian, cautious plodder, who has not the courage even to make a mistake, but safe in virtue of a temperament that inspires confidence. It cannot be said that Mr. Balfour has never made a mistake. On the contrary, he has often gone astray and slipped into error, chiefly because of that impatience of detail which is the constant theme of his hostile critics. A man has the defects of his qualities, though he may overcome them. Mr. Balfour, with his artistic intuitions, his fondness for philosophical generalization, his somewhat abstract cast of thought and his reluctance to face mere mental drudgery, has at times been convicted of a loose grasp of facts, and an incapacity or unwillingness to "get up" his subjects thoroughly. Even with the help of a private secretary who is a miracle of capable industry, and the assistance of

devoted colleagues, the First Lord of the Treasury will sometimes exhibit odd *lacunae* in the fabric of his information, and stumble in the course of debate into strange slips of ignorance or forgetfulness. But the House knows well that these inaccuracies are on the surface, that he understands and grasps the root of the matter. The slips are, perhaps, unfortunate; but they are not vital. Members feel that they have to deal with an intelligence fundamentally and laboriously conscientious. Mr. Balfour does not deceive himself, he does not deceive his followers, he does not willingly deceive his adversaries. If he has detected himself in error, if he has seen reason to alter his course or to change his mind, he says so. He will win a victory by subtlety, but not by *finesse* or by a suspicion of trickery. He tells the House frankly what he means to do, what aim and purpose he sets before himself, and his very contempt for details and processes assists, and often only confirms the impression of his straightforwardness. The helmsman may wear and tack too frequently, catching each puff of wind as it comes; but he has his eye on the haven and never really loses sight of the landmarks. *Respice ad finem* is his unspoken axiom. He makes steadily for the goal, turning aside for difficulties and obstacles, but neither daunted nor baffled by them. The House recognizes, if the outside public sometimes does not, the tenacity and resolution which lie behind his tactful, pleasant manner, and urbane style. And thus has he established a deserved reputation for integrity and persistence, which is the most valuable of all possessions to an English statesman.

His admirers would not claim for him that he is one of the great orators either of the senate or the platform; but he is the most effective debater, in the practical sense of being able to convince and convert his hearers. He has guided through the House of Commons some of the most difficult and controversial legislation of our time, and exhibited extraordinary skill in meeting objections and encountering hostile argument. Here his logical Scottish intellect serves him admirably. No one can state an opponent's case more deftly and turn it against him. Amid applauding cheers from the Opposition benches, he will summarize the points their best speakers have been making, in a few crisp sentences; and then he will swiftly invert the argument and show how these very points, rightly taken, tell in his own favour. In these arts of exposition he has few superiors. He will sweep away



superfluities and side issues, and in a lucid analysis bring out the principles which underlie a whole confused and confusing discussion. This power of clear expression, based on a firm grasp of essentials, has been conspicuously displayed in the heated debates on the Education Bill of the present Session. It is a measure necessarily somewhat complicated, and it has been obscured by a vast amount of sectarian prejudice, deliberately and unscrupulously invoked by the enemies of the Cabinet. But it has been a constant intellectual pleasure, to those who have been in the House of Commons, to watch how Mr. Balfour, with a sweep of his arm, so to speak, has rolled away the mists, and allowed the eye to dwell unobstructed on the clean-cut outlines of the structure. The speech in which he introduced the Bill, on March 24th, was an extraordinarily complete and concise summary of the entire question, and it placed the proposed solution before the House of Commons with characteristic clearness:

"Our reform,, if it is to be adequate, must, in the first place, establish one authority for education—technical, secondary, primary—possessed of powers which may enable it to provide for the adequate training of teachers, and for the welding of higher technical and higher secondary education on the university system. In the second place, I conclude that this one authority for education, being, as it is, responsible for a heavy cost to the ratepayers, should be the rating authority of the district. In the third place, I lay down that the voluntary schools must be placed in a position in which they can worthily play their necessary and inevitable part in the scheme of national education."

These are the main objects of the measure, which has aroused more party feeling than any that has been laid before this nation since Mr. Gladstone's last Home Rule Bill; and to this statement of the position Mr. Balfour has again and again brought back the House after an afternoon of miscellaneous squabbling. And, perhaps, when the dust of the combat has cleared away, it will be easier to see how well-conceived, how logical and symmetrical, are the methods with which the First Lord of the Treasury has endeavoured to remedy an evil that could not be left to cure itself.

From one to whom great opportunities are granted great achievements are expected. Mr. Balfour has proved himself a brilliant party leader, a capable Parliamentarian, a man who can command and direct. In his comparatively brief career as Chief Secretary for Ireland, he showed that he possessed other qualities. Those who were active in politics during the Parliament of 1886

tell us that his success in this capacity was the sudden and startling revelation of a forcible personality. He had passed with the House for a superfine aristocrat—cultured, fastidious, indolent. The announcement that he had been awarded the most difficult post in the Ministry at a time of crisis was received with laughter. *This* languid gentleman to be the “daring pilot in extremity?” Were those the hands to grasp the helm and steer the ship among the rocks and breakers? Mr. Balfour speedily and marvellously justified his appointment. Amazed and delighted, the nation and his party looked on, while he grappled with the Land League in Ireland, and faced Parnell and all his turbulent faction in the House of Commons. Firm, courageous, imperturbable, and withal conciliatory and judicious, he fought Irish disaffection without increasing Irish discontent. The smouldering sedition was sternly repressed, while yet rapid progress was made towards the removal of the legitimate grievances of Ireland. Mr. Balfour left the Irish Office with the deserved reputation of a great administrator, a statesman who understands the arts of government and reform.

It remains for him to bring to bear the abilities thus disclosed on problems deeper and more weighty than those which awaited him at Dublin Castle in 1887. Occasions, many and pressing, lie before him for the exercise of constructive statesmanship. The stage, one may say, has been cleared; he steps upon it before an expectant audience. Of the three men who have formed the innermost Cabinet, the real efficient government of the British Empire, for the past fifteen years, Mr. Balfour is the youngest, and his functions have so far been the least important. What Lord Salisbury has done for Britain will not be known, in all its fulness, till the search-light of the historian is turned upon the secret receptacle of the Foreign Offices and Chancelleries. The present generation will never hear the whole story. But enough has been revealed to give Lord Salisbury an unchallenged claim to the undying gratitude of his countrymen. He has controlled British foreign policy during such a period of strain and stress as has scarcely been known since the downfall of Napoleon Bonaparte. In the East and in the West, strange and startling events have occurred. The United States has entered upon the path of imperialism; Spain has fallen from the ranks of the Colonial Powers; Japan, instinct with fiery energy, has forced itself, with one fierce bound, into the circle of the warlike, progressive states. There

has been a new grouping of the European Powers; France and Russia have become allies, Greece and Turkey have been at war. The Venezuela dispute, the portentous upheaval in the Far East, the threatened rupture with France over Fashoda, the explosion of anti-English feeling on account of the Boer campaign, have had to be reckoned with, while Lord Salisbury was at Downing Street. No Choiseul or Kaunitz of the old European monarchies had a more complicated web of policy and intrigue to unravel or dis-sever. That massive, subtle brain has dealt with it all, and so dealt that Britain emerges with still shining prestige, with her influence in the world undiminished, with no solid interest sacrificed anywhere. Such, in brief, has been the task of Lord Salisbury, and it rests with posterity to recognize its magnitude.

Mr. Chamberlain's function has been different. To him it has fallen to preside over the revival of the imperial spirit in public affairs, which has been the most significant movement in recent English politics. The Secretary of State for the Colonies is the first great Colonial minister of our epoch. He has shown the English people the true value and import of the magnificent heritage handed down to them by their fathers. Skilfully taking advantage of the outburst of proud enthusiasm produced by the Jubilee of 1897, he brought the realms beyond the sea into the daily consciousness of stay-at-home Englishmen. Many factors, indeed, have conjoined to produce this result. It has been Mr. Chamberlain's supreme achievement to weld them together for the purposes of practical politics. The difficulty in South Africa presented him with a test case, and he employed it in order to bring home to all subjects of the Crown the true meaning of the word Empire. He is the successor in the direct line of Lord Beaconsfield, and it has been his privilege to popularize and stamp with reality the vast conception which loomed dimly before the imagination of the author of "*Coningsby*" and "*Tancred*." It is a singular fate which has converted the social reformer of the seventies into the champion of the flag and the vindicator of the Imperial ideal. Possibly, if Mr. Chamberlain were twenty years, or even ten years, younger, and if he were less deeply occupied with the chosen task of his later period, he might again re-enter the sphere of his earlier activity, and inaugurate the series of administrative and legislative reforms for which the country is now ripe. One cannot ignore the fact that Mr. Chamberlain, with all his vigour, vivacity and

courage, is no longer young or middle-aged; in four years, indeed, he will be three-score and ten. Moreover, the duty of re-settling South Africa, and dealing with many other pressing Colonial problems, is likely to absorb his energies for some time to come. We can hardly look to the Colonial Secretary to preside over a new era of constructive statesmanship.

That office, it seems, is reserved for the present Prime Minister. Mr. Balfour has unequalled opportunities for initiating and carrying to a successful conclusion a comprehensive policy of reform. Few of his predecessors have been better placed for such a task. He is in the prime of life; he has an admirable personal and mental equipment; he enjoys a commanding influence alike with the legislature and the nation; he has proved his capacity for leadership; and he commands an overwhelming Parliamentary majority, only too willing to obey his behests. Within reason, indeed, it may be said that he can do practically what he pleases in the House of Commons; since the Opposition, in its present disorganized condition, can at the best do no more than criticise. Above all, Mr. Balfour finds public opinion in a responsive frame of mind. For the past few years, the Conservative Party has been compelled to devote itself mainly to what may be called defensive work. It has had to protect the integrity of the Kingdom and the Empire against domestic opponents and external enemies. Revolution at home and disintegration abroad have been necessarily the particular objects of its attention. It has found itself forced to devote the main portion of its energies to counteracting the separatist agitation in Ireland, and opposing the Little England spirit, which would have been fatal to the maintenance of Imperial unity. It has seen, with a just instinct, that its paramount duty was to endorse the foreign policy of Lord Salisbury, the Colonial policy of Mr. Chamberlain, and the Unionist attitude with regard to Ireland.

These were great watchwords; but there is a growing conviction that they do not represent the whole statesmanship which the needs of the opening century enjoin. We have attained, thanks mainly to the clear-sighted firmness of the Conservative leaders and the steady loyalty of their followers, a truce from the more pressing anxieties of the past decade. It is felt by the more active exponents of Unionist opinion that it does not suffice to repose on the recollection of past successes. In the respite thus granted, the

opportunity for constructive effort recurs. It is the fervent hope of the more active-minded Conservatives, and particularly of the group of able young men who are beginning to claim a prominent share in the operations of the party, that Mr. Balfour will not fail to respond to the trend of opinion. The nation, while on the whole fairly content with the manner in which its affairs have been conducted, is not altogether satisfied with itself and with its institutions. The feeling in favour of an enlarged efficiency is a genuine one. Lord Rosebery, with his journalistic instinct for the topic that is in the air, has given expression to the demand; but Lord Rosebery, with all his gifts, is, as things at present stand, only an highly-distinguished and accomplished amateur. He does little more than advise and suggest and frame phrases which may mean much or little. It is only the man with his hands upon the levers of administration who can give personal effect to the sentiment. In fact, if we are to become a more efficient nation, it is for the Ministry to show the way; and by the Ministry, in this connection, one specifically means Mr. Balfour.

The field of reform is, indeed, gigantic. There is, in the first place, the reform of English civil government to be considered. England used to be the model for the world in its central and local administration. It is so no longer. One has only to turn to Germany, to the United States, and even to our own Colonies, to see in how many respects we have allowed our administrative machinery to drop below the level of a scientific and industrial age. The Board of Trade, the Local Government Board, the Home Office, are organized on lines which no longer render them equal to the enlarged duties which fall, or should fall, upon them. They suffer from some of the same defects as the British Army. The mischances and miscalculations of the earlier part of the Boer war aroused an angry outcry for military re-organization. There was much talk of all the things that should be done: the "drastic" remedies that were to be applied. But the war has terminated, and the zeal of the reformers has already slackened. It remains for Mr. Balfour to see to it that the whole question is dealt with in a bold and comprehensive fashion, and by truly organic methods. There is the chance of doing for England in this matter something comparable to that which was effected in Prussia after the disasters of the Napoleonic conquest. I am not suggesting, of course, that we are to plunge headlong into conscription, or com-

pulsory service of any kind; but I do say that the re-construction of the British military system is a task far too weighty to be left to a mere Departmental Minister. It should be taken in hand by the head of a Cabinet and a great party, clothed with all the fullness of his authority; and it should be pressed upon the attention of the country as, for example, the abolition of the Corn Laws was by Sir Robert Peel, or the disestablishment of the Irish Church by Mr. Gladstone.

Again, there are the questions of fiscal reform, and of commercial and industrial regulation. These are matters which have been too long thrust on one side, or treated as merely subordinate affairs, unworthy the notice of those who preside over governments and busy themselves with *la haute politique*. But they are growing insistent; they will not wait. It is time that a Conservative Cabinet should have a mind of its own on these subjects, and should be prepared to carry its convictions into effect. For the future of Britain, its place in the world, nay, the very existence of its teeming town-bred populations, depends upon the manner in which they are handled. There are various other social and economic problems, which have been dabbled with in an amateurish, tentative fashion on the platform, in Parliament, and in the press, and these are now claiming definite and rational solution. I refer to such topics as the Housing of the Working Classes, Poor Law Administration, the control and regulation of locomotion, the relations of Municipalities to the Central Government and to private corporations. Further, the country stands in need of a reform of education going far deeper than anything which is attempted in the Bill at present before the House of Commons. Great Britain is jeopardising her commanding industrial position by failing to keep abreast of the highest knowledge of the century. Something much more than a possible slight improvement in the character of the elementary schools is required. The nation stands in need of a more effective training for all classes of the population, from the professors in the University, the thinkers and teachers in the Laboratory, the captains of industry in factory and workshop, down to the labourer in the brickyard and the young woman behind the counter.

All this, I may be told, is mere truism. Is it not repeated month by month in the thoughtful magazines, vociferated by distinguished persons at Congresses and Conferences? Exactly; but

something more is needed. We want a practical statesman, who has the power as well as the will to bring all these things within the range and scope of actual politics, and to indicate the actual steps by which the scientific efficiency and value of the nation may be increased. Constitutional reform, too, has not yet reached its limits, though one may conceive that the lines of development will be somewhat modified. Some of the old political issues may have lost their interest; but new needs arise with new conditions. Parliament is suffering from nothing so much as from the fact that it is choked and congested by the stream of business which flows into it. The effort to control and supervise all the affairs, great and small, of a nation of forty millions of people, not to mention those of an empire nine times as numerous, is too heavy a burden for any Assembly. In the hurrying competition for some scrap of legislative attention, imperial politics are apt to be scamped, and local politics neglected. Means must be devised, by some method of devolution, applicable no doubt in due measure to all the constituent countries of the British Isles, to ease the Parliament at Westminster of part of its load. The experience which has been gained in the smooth-working central and State legislatures in other parts of the Anglo-Saxon world must be applied to this problem, if the House of Commons, as some of its hostile critics have already gleefully suggested, is not to become a mere impotent appendage to London society, or a recording chamber for the decrees of an all-powerful Cabinet. It has been urged also, not without force and reason, on the part of many most friendly to the Unionist cause, that some change of men as well as of methods is required. The control of public affairs has been, perhaps, overlong in the hands of a small group of persons closely connected by social and family ties. The Conservative Party, it is held, is in some danger of passing, like the Whigs of the eighteenth century, into the hands of a "Family Compact." Its chosen administrators and officials are composed, as indeed was the case in the domination of the great Whig "houses," of men who, for the most part, are capable, high-minded and public-spirited. But they represent a too exclusive element in the life of a great nation; they tend, necessarily, to become limited and sectional; by no means seldom, they exhibit amateurishness in the treatment of great and grave questions, with which they can never have been in personal contact. The circle should be widened; some of the "old guard" who

have been in and out of office for twenty years should not, through an excessive patriotism and a fond knowledge of departmental work, bar the way of younger politicians in keener sympathy and in closer touch with the movements of the age. Above all, a real and convincing effort should be made to enlist in the service of the state the highest business talent, the best expert knowledge, the most thoroughly tested capacity, the most extended practical—not academical—knowledge, which the country can produce.

These are among the high and inspiring duties which await Mr. Balfour. The chance seems to lie before him of writing his name upon the roll of the great reforming ministers of England. He has an opportunity, scarcely less promising than that which lay before William Pitt in the first few years of his ministry, when he was laying, broad and deep, the foundations of economic and political reform, before the cataclysm in France diverted his energies to other objects. With the Empire at peace, and likely, as it seems, to remain so for many years to come, Mr. Balfour may adapt, to the more complex conditions of our own time, the methods of the greatest of all his Conservative predecessors in office. Pitt, with the prescience of genius, saw that England must “wake up” if she were to cope adequately with the problems awaiting her on the threshold of the nineteenth century. The problems are more numerous and more complicated at the beginning of the twentieth, and a new Pitt is needed to enable us to grapple with them. We have lived too long on the traditions of the sixties and seventies, forgetting that while we have been standing still, the world has been moving with inconvenient rapidity. Another ten years, spent in playing languidly with the old themes, in squabbling over political controversies that have largely lost their meaning, and even in repeating, without altogether understanding them, the catchwords of Empire and Union, are not to be contemplated with equanimity. Such a state of affairs would be fatal to the Unionist party, as well as mischievous to national interests. The country assuredly expects something more vital and effective from a political connection, dowered with such transcendent advantages as the Unionists possess at the present time. If Conservative reform should be wanting, we may confidently expect a Radical revival, of a democratic, perhaps even a socialistic, colour. Impatience might take the dangerous form of a widespread revolt against property and the propertied classes, with an



incitement to clever unscrupulous demagogues to undertake the task which moderate men will have shirked. The prospect, indeed, would be a dubious one, if we could conceive Mr. Balfour a mere Premier *fainéant*, a Premier content to move sluggishly along the old groove, doing nothing in particular but keeping his party in power. Fortunately, we need have no such dismal expectation. Mr. Balfour's real vigour and energy, his sensitive receptiveness of the impressions of the age, his unfailing interest in all the problems of modern science, and his patriotic ambition, mark him out to fulfil some at least of the high tasks which I have ventured to outline in the foregoing pages. In his reform of the rules of Procedure, in his Irish Legislation, and in the Education Bill, he has in some degree laid down the sub-structure of a great scheme of internal reform. We should have no doubt that he will go far to complete the stately edifice during his next few years of office. The path of fame and enduring usefulness lies before him, in the direction of constructive statesmanship; and it can be confidently expected that, in following it, he will gain even higher titles to the esteem of his countrymen than those which he has justly obtained in the past.

GILBERT PARKER.